

Emergency Health and Medical Services Administration

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA FACT SHEET

What is an Influenza Pandemic?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide.

Definitions***Seasonal Flu***

Respiratory illness transmitted from person to person. A typical flu season begins in October and ends in May of the following year. Annual vaccinations are available. Many people will have some degree of immunity. Community resources are generally overwhelmed. There may be a mild impact on the economy.

Pandemic Flu

Signs and symptoms may be more severe with increased risk of complications due to the virulence of the flu strain. Outbreaks will occur globally and potentially overwhelm and/or strain healthcare systems. The pandemic influenza may come in waves. There is no annual vaccine currently available. Vaccine production is estimated to take approximately 6 months. There may be a significant impact on the economy.

Avian (bird) Flu

A naturally occurring virus found in wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic

fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. Currently there is no human immunity nor is there a vaccine.

Flu Facts***Seasonal Flu***

Outbreaks follow a predictable seasonal pattern and there is usually some degree of immunity in the population. The at-risk population consists of the elderly and the very young and the health care system has the capacity to meet public needs during seasonal flu. Vaccines are available in adequate supply as well as antiviral medications. There are approximately 36,000 seasonal flu deaths per year. Typical flu symptoms consist of fever, cough, runny nose, and muscle pain with pneumonia being the leading cause of death.

Pandemic Flu

Outbreaks will occur globally and there will be no existing immunity in the population due to the emergence of a new virus. The entire population is at risk; even healthy individuals are at increased risk of serious complications from the pandemic flu. Pandemic Influenza has the potential for overwhelming healthcare resources globally, leaving each locality dependent on its own resources. There may not be an adequate supply of antiviral medications and vaccine development may take up to 6 months.



Government of the
District of Columbia
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Characteristics and Challenges

Global spread will be inevitable. Preparation measures must take into account that typical regional resources may not be available.

Travel restrictions and border closures may delay the virus, but will not restrict it.

Health care systems will easily become overwhelmed as illness and infection rates soar and re-emerge in waves.

A shortage of healthcare personnel will occur due to:

Those who become ill.

Those remaining at home to care for the ill.

Those too fearful to leave home.

New vaccine production will take approximately 6 months and antiviral drugs are likely to be in short supply. Personnel shortages and lack of hospital beds, ventilators and other resources will severely impact the delivery of care. Prioritization of vaccines and medications will become essential.